

I claim:

1. A merchandise inspection system for a remote seller and prospective buyer comprising:

a service providing the remote seller and prospective buyer with merchandise-inspection information services, comprising merchandise-inspection information storage means for storing merchandise-inspection information applicable to merchandise of the seller;

a distributed community of point-of-access associates, linked to the merchandise-inspection information storage means by a communications medium, for physically processing inspections by the prospective buyer of the seller's merchandise submitted to a given point-of-access associate if authorized after application to the merchandise-inspection information storage means; whereby the prospective buyer may refuse the inspected merchandise in consequence of the inspection.

2. The merchandise inspection system of claim 1 wherein:

the merchandise-inspection information stored on the storage means includes information on particular conditions of release by the given point-of-access associate of the inspected merchandise to the prospective buyer.

3. The merchandise inspection system of claim 2 wherein particular conditions of release by the given point-of-access associate of the inspected merchandise to the prospective buyer include verification that the prospective buyer sufficiently fulfills or secures payment or barter for the inspected merchandise.

4. The merchandise inspection system of claim 2 further comprising:
merchandise identifiers associated with the merchandise before or concurrent with the seller's submission of the merchandise to the given point-of-access associate wherein the identifiers facilitate research of information in the merchandise-inspection information storage means.

5. The merchandise inspection system of claim 1 further comprising a plurality of remote sellers who transact with the merchandise inspection information service and who deal in a wide variety of differing goods, wherein the distributed community of point-of-access associates generally provide retail mail, parcel and shipping services generally not directly competitive with the goods of the sellers.

6. The merchandise inspection system of claim 1 wherein the service and at least some of the distributed community of point-of-access associates are part of a common organization.

7. A method providing a prospective acceptor an opportunity to inspect the offered goods of a remote offeror as a condition precedent to acceptance, comprising the steps of:

providing the offeror and prospective acceptor with a goods-inspection information service, including storage of inspection and terms-of-acceptance information pertaining to the offered goods of the offeror;

providing a distributed community of point-of-access associates who can physically process such inspections with links to the goods-inspection information service by a communications medium;

the offeror entrusting the offered goods to a given point-of-access associate and thereby affording the acceptor the condition-precedent opportunity to inspect the offered goods;

the given point-of-access associate providing the prospective acceptor with the opportunity to inspect the offered goods upon application to inspect; and, upon further application to accept, the given point-of-access associate requesting from the goods-inspection information service the pertinent inspection and terms-of-acceptance information, and then processing the acceptance of the offered goods if the pertinent terms of acceptance are met.

8. The goods inspection method of claim 7 wherein the pertinent inspection information includes disposition information in cases of refusal or failure to act timely to inspect.

9. The goods inspection method of claim 7 wherein the pertinent inspection and terms-of-acceptance information includes information on how given point-of-access associate should confirm if the acceptor sufficiently meets pre-scribed terms of payment or barter, if any.

10. The goods inspection method of claim 7 further comprising:

providing goods identifiers for attachment to the offered goods before or concurrent with the offeror entrusting the offered goods to the given point-of-access associate, wherein the identifiers facilitate the information service's research when servicing information requests.

11. The goods inspection method of claim 7 wherein the communications medium comprises the Internet global computer information network.

12. The goods inspection method of claim 7 further comprising the offeror inputting the offered goods with an arbitrary different one of the point-of-access associates who in consequence transmits the inputted goods to the given the point-of-access associate where the prospective acceptor may inspect.

13. The goods inspection method of claim 12 wherein the offeror inputs the pertinent inspection and terms-of-acceptance information concurrently with inputting the offered goods.

14. A method providing a prospective acceptor an opportunity to inspect an offered item of a remote offeror as a condition precedent to acceptance, comprising the steps of:

providing a distributed community of intermediary point-of-access associates for physically hosting such inspections;

a remote offeror of an item offering a prospective acceptor the item for acceptance upon condition precedent of an inspection of the offered item;

the offeror inputting the item with an arbitrary one of the point-of-access associates who in consequence transfers the item to a given other of the point-of-access associates where the prospective acceptor will inspect;

providing the distributed community of intermediary point-of-access associates with links to an inspection-transaction information service by the Internet computer information network;

the offeror inputting with the inspection-transaction information service the terms of acceptance of the offered item;

the given other point-of-access associate providing the prospective acceptor with the opportunity to inspect the offered item upon application to inspect; and, upon further application to accept, the given other point-of-access associate requesting from the inspection-transaction information service the pertinent terms of acceptance, and then processing the acceptance of the offered goods if the pertinent terms of acceptance are met.

15. The goods inspection method of claim 14 wherein the terms of acceptance include payment or barter terms.

16. The goods inspection method of claim 14 further comprising in case of refusal by the prospective acceptor to timely inspect or accept after inspection, the inspection-transaction information service providing disposition information regarding the item.

17. The goods inspection method of claim 14 further comprising:
the seller providing security for covering the cost of disposition of the item in case of refusal by the prospective acceptor to timely inspect or accept after inspection, which security may be inputted with any one of the point-of-access parties or the inspection-transaction information service, including the arbitrary one of the point-of-access parties at the time of inputting the item.

18. The goods inspection method of claim 14 further comprising:
the prospective acceptor providing security for covering the cost of disposition of the item in case of refusal by the prospective acceptor to timely inspect or accept after inspection, which security may be inputted with the given other of the point-of-access associates, any different others of the point-of-access associates, or the inspection-transaction information service.

19. The goods inspection method of claim 14 further comprising either the inspection-transaction information service or the community of point-of-access associates, including solely the given other point-of-access associate, originating contact with the prospective acceptor upon the readiness of the given item for inspection.

20. The goods inspection method of claim 19 wherein either the offeror, the inspection-transaction information service or the community of point-of-access associates monitors the lapse of time and follow-up contacts with the prospective acceptor, if any, since the original contact in order to decide whether the prospective acceptor constructively refuses by reason of failure to act timely to inspect.